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### **ECONOMIC GROWTH**

(Economic Reform, Private Sector Development, Trade and Agriculture)

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THE ECONOMY

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## Northern Mindanao veggie group assures of stable prices

**CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY —** Prices of vegetables coming from Northern Mindanao will remain steady, an official of a vegetable producers' association said yesterday.

“Unlike rice, the price of vegetables is not decided by the market. Vegetables have a particularly lower demand,” said Leo M. Eduria, vegetable coordinator for the Northern Mindanao Vegetable Producers' Association, Inc. (NorminVeggies).

The group supplies high-quality vegetable not only to Northern Mindanao, but also to the rest of the Visayas and Metro Manila.

Mr. Eduria said that they cannot increase the prices of vegetables so much, even if they have been hit by rising production costs. “Commercial fertilizer cost has tripled in just a couple of months. Before it was only like P500 per kilo, now the cost would be from P1,100/kg to P1,700/kg,” said Mr. Eduria.

One option to take, he said, is to use organic fertilizers. “We're getting back to basics,” he said, noting that it is better for farmers to go for organic fertilizers since it is also environment-friendly.

“It's good that the association has not increased the vegetable

prices, although eventually they will get affected because of the higher cost of production due to higher fuel prices,” said Agriculture regional director Lealyn A. Ramos in a separate interview at the opening of the Farmers and Fisherfolks' month on Wednesday.

NorminVeggies, as an association, has received assistance from the government and US-funded Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM), since it was organized in 1999. From 15 members based in Misamis Oriental and Bukidnon, the group grew to 165 members producing high-value vegetables including semi-temperate crops

that grow in the uplands.

The Department of Agriculture and GEM co-funded and provided technical assistance to the group to help it establish its consolidation center, which handles tons of assorted vegetables daily for transport to other regions.

The consolidation center, known locally as *bagsakan* in Agora market in barangay Lapasan, serves as the key trading outlet and wholesale market for the member farmers.

The association plans to establish a regional *bagsakan* center this year, near transport terminals and seaports, to which they can

transfer. He said that the consolidation center in Agora market has become too small to accommodate their volumes.

“We are planning to have a one-stop shop like the concept of a supermarket where temperate and tropical kinds of vegetables are there,” said Mr. Eduria.

Mr. Eduria said that they also need assistance from the Department of Agriculture in terms of technology and postharvest facilities.

“We are asking assistance for a rain shelter because heavy rains damage our vegetable farms. With updated technology, we can have

improve production,” said Mr. Eduria.

Ms. Ramos said that the Agriculture department has already approved the rain shelter assistance with a counterpart funding scheme.

“We have also assisted them in marketing their produce,” said Ms. Ramos.

Mr. Eduria said there is still much room for growth in local vegetable consumption.

“We will be promoting that we are to host the 6<sup>th</sup> National Vegetable Congress this June 25 and 26,” said Mr. Eduria. — Geefe Alba